



Introduction and Welcome!

I would like to begin this update by wishing you a very happy Christmas. As this will be my last update for 2021, I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy New Year too!

We go into 2022 with a veil of uncertainty over us. Once again, the news headlines are dominated by COVID-19, fuelled by the exponential growth of the Omicron variant. Yet again we count on the commitment and dedication of our NHS staff, GP practices, local pharmacies and volunteers who are working hard to help administer life-saving vaccinations and booster jabs. I would also like to highlight the work of our local care sector who are very much on the front line, doing excellent work looking after our loved ones.

Turning to other matters, this week we published our draft budget proposals and medium-term financial plan up to 2025. Delivering a balanced revenue budget whilst protecting vital services is at the heart of our budget proposals and these will be considered at the Council's **Executive meeting on Thursday 23 December**.

The budget proposals aim to further develop firm financial foundations for the Council as it moves into its second year of operation. They focus on the transformation of services as well as developing policies around the Council's Corporate Plan which I covered in the November 19 (Edition 12) issue of this update.

Of particular note, the Council has outlined a commitment to tackling the effects of climate change. This is emphasised with a dedicated pot of £1 million over the next three years to be invested in measures that help move the area towards net carbon zero. I am sure this helps demonstrate that the commitment we have made to tackling climate change in our Corporate Plan is one we are serious about.

We are also proposing to reintroduce bus subsidies for rural routes, helping to connect communities and reduce car journeys as well as make other investments in local services. Given the importance of the Council's proposed budget, I have provided further information on it below. Whilst on the subject of making investments in local services, the Council also recently launched a grants scheme for voluntary and community groups. We are keen to encourage local groups to apply for small grants to help improve the lives of local residents. The funding of up to £5,000 is being made available by North Northamptonshire Council and will be available for application up to 31 January 2022. I have provided more information on this below. I would appreciate your support in helping to spread the word.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in this update on local public services and initiatives over the last few months. I look forward to getting in touch again early in 2022. Whatever your plans this Christmas, I hope you have a relaxing and enjoyable time in a manner in which you feel safe.

Budget proposals focus on providing firm financial foundations for North Northamptonshire

Delivering a balanced revenue budget while working hard to protect vital services is at the heart of proposals which will be put before North Northamptonshire Council's Executive next week. The budget will set out a **detailed spending strategy** for the Council for the financial year 2022-2023 as well as outlining the medium-term financial plan for the next three years. The budget further develops firm financial foundations for the Council as it settles into its second year following the reorganisation of local government in Northamptonshire.

Proposals focus on the transformation of services as well as developing policies around the Council's Corporate Plan. The Council's commitment to tackling the effects of climate change is emphasised with a dedicated pot of £1 million over the next three years to be invested in moving towards net carbon zero. The authority is proposing to reintroduce bus subsidies for rural routes, helping connect communities and reduce car journeys. The council is also investing in Northamptonshire Children's Trust to help deliver service improvements for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Financial stability is one of the cornerstones of local government and it's essential that we're in a robust and stable position if we are to deliver quality services to the people of North Northamptonshire. I'm pleased that despite the uncertain times we're living in, we've been able to draft proposals that aim to benefit our residents whilst, at the same time, are affordable. I have outlined further below some of the key proposals included within the budget:

Council Tax

It is proposed that council tax is increased by 2.99%, which includes the adult social care levy of 1%. This would contribute around £5.2m per annum and would represent a Band D level of Council Tax for North Northamptonshire Council of £1,578.73.

The above represents an increase of £45.83 (equivalent to £0.88 per week) from the Band D Council Tax level of £1,532.90 in 2021/22. This Band D figure does not include the Council Tax for individual Town and Parish Councils or the Council Tax set for Fire and Police by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

There is no change to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme which will continue at 25%.

Net budget

The net revenue budget for 2022/2023 is £293.2million, providing a range of services to residents and businesses across the area, including care to vulnerable adults and children, education, the disposal and collection of waste, household waste recycling, economic development and housing and support for homeless people.

The Council is also investing in staff to help deliver its services. Last year, the minimum level of pay for our staff was raised to £9.50 per hour (equivalent to the real living wage). Further pay awards for 2022/23 will be subject to any national announcements and consultation.

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a separate ring-fenced account within the Council for the income and expenditure associated with its housing stock.

The HRA does not directly impact on the Council's wider general fund budget or on the level of council tax. Income to the HRA is primarily received through the rents and other charges paid by tenants and leaseholders.

This year's HRA proposal is for a balanced budget for the two Neighbourhood Accounts, which means there is no need to use reserves for funding.

There is also a proposed rent increase of 4.1% for the next financial year, which is in line with the government guidelines for rent setting levels. Any funding received by the HRA is retained within the HRA and will be used to support housing improvements and maintenance.

Next steps

The draft revenue budget will be discussed at a meeting of the Executive on December 23 (reports can be found here [Agenda for Executive on Thursday 23 December, 2021](#)) and, if approved, a consultation on the proposals will start the same day, running until Friday, January 28, 2022. The Executive will then meet on 10 February to consider the final budget proposals for recommendation to Full Council on 24 February.

Plans outlined to support economic recovery and growth

At our meeting on 16 December, North Northamptonshire Council's Executive discussed the plans and activities being undertaken to support economic recovery and growth to help counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Executive discussed details of successful funding bids through the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund and Welcome Back Fund, progress with activities funded via the Additional Restrictions Grant, opportunities to bid for further funding through the Levelling Up Fund and ahead to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The report also provided an update on the Construction Skills 2 project and Executive agreed to plans to produce an Economic Prospectus for the area.

You can view the full report by using the following link: [Agenda for Executive on Thursday 16 December](#).

Thousands of businesses and communities throughout North Northamptonshire have been affected by the ongoing pandemic and North Northamptonshire Council is committed to providing support where we can.

I look forward to hearing about the progress that has already been made and our team looks forward to continuing to work on initiatives such as developing a new Economic Prospectus for North Northamptonshire.

Community grants now available to help transform lives in North Northamptonshire

Voluntary and community groups are being encouraged to apply for small grants to help improve the lives of local residents. The funding of up to £5,000 is being made available by North Northamptonshire Council up to 31 January 2022. There are two funding rounds during December and January:

- Grants up to £2,500 – with monthly deadlines for applications of 31 December 2021 and 31 January 2022
- Grants of between £2,500 and £5,000 – with monthly deadlines of 20 December 2021 and 31 January 2022

The scheme is open to community and voluntary sector organisations, registered charities and not-for-profit organisations, with priority given to projects that support the Council's key priorities and the strategic aims.

As a reminder, the Council's six key commitments are:

- **Active, fulfilled lives** – helping people live healthier, more active, independent and fulfilled lives.
- **Better, brighter futures** – caring for young people, providing them with a high-quality education and opportunities to help them flourish.
- **Safe and thriving places** – enabling a thriving and successful economy that shapes great places to live, learn, work and visit.
- **Green, sustainable environment** – taking a lead on improving the green environment, making the area more sustainable for generations to come.
- **Connected communities** – ensuring our communities are connected with one another so they are able to shape their lives and areas where they live.
- **Modern public services** – providing efficient, effective and affordable services that make a real difference to all our local communities.

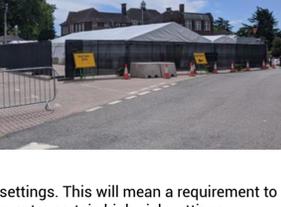
I am sure there will be lots of ideas for funding bids. However, applications could be to support a local street party to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, helping to encourage wildlife in a local pocket park, or sports and play equipment for a community group. Any groups that want to **find out more** about what is available and criteria needed to apply can do so on the Council's website.

Alternatively, email communityfunding@northnorthants.gov.uk to request an application form.

I would urge community and voluntary groups to get in contact and apply for these small grants as they can make a big difference to people's lives. We are proud to work closely with the voluntary sector organisations and groups, who make a crucial difference in their areas and are essential for community cohesion. As a Council, we are committed to building strong sustainable communities and these grants will make a huge difference in making that happen.

COVID-19

As you will know, the Prime Minister has announced increased measures to help slow the spread of the Omicron variant and reduce the chances of the NHS coming under unsustainable pressure, whilst ensuring more boosters are delivered.



In summary, the measures announced are:

- Mandatory face covering rules are extended to most indoor settings (but will not include hospitality settings).
- Guidance is for people to work from home if they can. Anyone who cannot work from home should continue to travel to their workplace.
- Introduction of mandatory certification for certain settings. This will mean a requirement to show vaccination status or a recent negative test to enter certain high-risk settings.

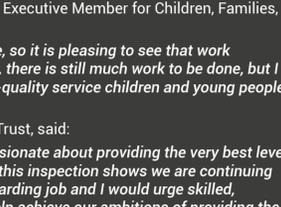
These measures are in addition to:

- Continuing to regularly self-test, especially before meeting others, socialising or going to crowded or enclosed places. Self-isolate if necessary.
- Ensuring you have had your vaccines or boosters - being fully vaccinated is the best way for people to protect themselves against COVID-19.
- Continuing to let in fresh air when meeting indoors.

For more information please go to [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Improvement continues at Northamptonshire Children's Services

The latest Ofsted monitoring inspection shows Children's Services in Northamptonshire are continuing to improve and that senior leadership have realistic plans in place which are already proving successful. In the second monitoring visit since the foundation of Northamptonshire's two unitary authorities in April, Ofsted inspectors focused on Children in Care aged 16+ and Care Leavers during their visit at the beginning of November.



In a letter to both North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council, the inspectors said: "Senior leaders demonstrate in their recently updated self-assessment that they know their services well and are committed to improving the lives of children and young people.

"Improvement plans are realistic and continue to be implemented with success despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic."

Inspectors did recognise there are still improvements to be made and that the quality of the service was still too variable, but said senior leaders have realistic plans in place to address this. Much of what we need to do to is to improve consistency of practice and the recruitment and retention of staff.

Clr Scott Edwards, North Northamptonshire Council's Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills, said:

"A lot of hard work has gone into improving the service, so it is pleasing to see that work beginning to pay off. But we cannot rest on our laurels, there is still much work to be done, but I am confident the foundations are in place for the high-quality service children and young people in this county deserve."

Julian Wooster, Chair of Northamptonshire Children's Trust, said:

"Everyone at Northamptonshire Children's Trust is passionate about providing the very best level of care to the county's children and young people and this inspection shows we are continuing on the right path. Social work can be an extremely rewarding job and I would urge skilled, experienced social work practitioners to join us and help achieve our ambitions of providing the highest possible level of care to our children and young people."

Inspectors also praised the strengthened Corporate Parenting Board acknowledging its role in the establishment of council tax discount schemes for care leavers, for adding partners to increase the profile of corporate parenting, but also for recognising shortfalls by planning to increase the number of care leavers on the board.

The letter from Ofsted is available to [read online](#). Northamptonshire Children's Trust is currently offering welcome bonuses for anyone [joining the team](#).

North Northamptonshire Council appoints a temporary director of Children's Services,

As previously mentioned, Cathi Hadley, Director of Children Services (DCS), will be leaving North Northamptonshire Council (on 21 January 2022) to take up a similar role closer to home at BCP Council.

Following the Council meeting on 1 December, the Chief Executive, in consultation with all Group Leaders and the Executive, has now appointed AnnMarie Dodds as the Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS), effective from when Cathi leaves the Council.

AnnMarie is currently the Assistant Director of Children Services at North Northamptonshire Council. She has a wealth of experience in Children's Services and has performed the role of DCS prior to her time here at North Northamptonshire. AnnMarie will fulfil her new role when Cathi leaves up to the point where we appoint a new permanent DCS and they start with us.

Press releases

To help you stay abreast of the key things the Council has been doing, I have included some links to the Council's press releases below (starting with the most recent):

Closure order granted in North Northants	Balanced budget to provide firm financial foundations for North Northants
Major improvements to Kettering's town centre due to start in January	North Northants Council outlines plans to support economic recovery and growth
Public Health officials advise 'Let's all play our part once again, take Plan B seriously and follow the rules strictly'	Improvement continues at Northamptonshire Children's Services
Three confirmed COVID-19 Omicron variant cases in North Northamptonshire	Case of COVID-19 with mutations consistent with B.1.1.529 (Omicron) has been identified in North Northamptonshire

If you would like stay up to date with the Council's media releases, you can visit the news section of the Council's website: www.northnorthants.gov.uk/news

Or follow Twitter [@NNNorthantsC](https://twitter.com/NNNorthantsC) and/or Facebook [@NorthNorthants](https://www.facebook.com/NorthNorthants)

Social media: Top stories

To follow our social media accounts you can find us on [Facebook North Northamptonshire Council - Home](https://www.facebook.com/NorthNorthamptonshireCouncil) and on Twitter by following [@NorthNorthantsC](https://twitter.com/NorthNorthantsC)

Top Tweets and posts from 13 December - 15 December:

Facebook: (measured by reach and post clicks)

- You must not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that are found. (reach 1,842, post clicks 3)
- Don't let Covid ruin your Holiday Season, please follow the guidance. (reach 1,524, post clicks 11)
- The COVID-19 booster jab is available at drop-in clinics around the county. (reach 1,520, post clicks 118)

Twitter: (measured by impressions and engagements)

- Thursday is polling day in Raunds for a Councillor to the Town Council. (Impressions 1,018, post engagement 24)
- Don't let Covid ruin your Holiday Season, please follow the guidance. (Impressions 933, post engagement 22)
- COVID-19 has affected us all and had a big impact on our health and wellbeing. (Impressions 746, post engagement 13)

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. If you have ideas of items to include in future updates please let me know at: executive@northnorthants.gov.uk

With Best Wishes,
Jason